PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR: DEVELOPING A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK TO ENSURE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING OF EMPLOYEES

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*Abstract :*This paper highlights the influence of human psychology on organizational behavior and effectiveness. Organizational behavior has contributions from multiple disciplines and of them; the contribution of psychology is the most prominent. It is important to understand the individual behavior of employees in order to understand his/her behavior in a group. In this paper, different organizational behavior frameworks are discussed and social cognitive framework has been identified as the best model to understand organizational behavior.Then, a psychological framework for ensuring employee wellbeing has been developed. The nature of this paper is mainly conceptual and aims at theory development.

Keywords: Social cognitive theory, Employee wellbeing, Employee engagement, Employee empowerment, Empathy, Emotional resilience.

I. INTRODUCTION

The most valuable resource of any organization is its people. The currency of business success today is talent - an organization's people, from its current and future leaders to its frontline employees. And in an age of talent, the war for this precious commodity is not only fierce but now truly global.(Cheese, 2008). Nurturing the human capital requires a thorough understanding of human behavior. The study of psychology has helped in making significant contributions in understanding and solving human problems which are encountered in business settings. It has resulted in adept management of human resources, improved methods of personnel selection, appraisal and training, improved morale and efficiency of operations and amicable working conditions (McKenna, 2000).According to the Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, "Industrial-organizational (I-O) psychology is the scientific study of the workplace. Rigor and methods of psychology are applied to issues of critical relevance to business, including talent management, coaching, assessment, selection, training, organizational development, performance, and work-life balance".

 Industrial / Organizational psychologists try to study and understand how employee behaviors and attitudes can be enriched through hiring practices, training programs, and feedback and management systems. Psychological approaches in organizations should be incorporated in all stages of the employee life cycle but not just as formal procedures. Even if dedicated personnel are unavailable for this task, the management of an organization has to make sure that the psychological wellbeing of their employees is carefully monitored as they transition in to each stage of the employee lifecycle. This paper attempts to discuss different psychological frameworks for organizational behavior and suggest the most appropriate approach for dealing with employee behavior in organizations. Based on that, a psychological framework for employee wellbeing was developed.

Material and methods

The nature of this paper is purely conceptual. Literary study of several books and research papers has been conducted and theory development has been aimed.

Theoretical development: Psychological Frameworks of Organizational behavior

Behavioristic Framework

Behavior was defined by Watsonas the whole set of organized responses leading toa process of adjustment to the environment. As there was no behavior without astimulus, or a stimulus-situation, all mechanisms werereviewed as stimulus-response (SR) chains. (Lecas, 2006) Modern behaviorism, that marks its beginning with B.F. Skinner, advocates that behavior in response to a stimulus is contingent on environmental consequences. Thus, behavioristic approach is based on observable behavior and environmental variables (Luthans, 2005).Behaviorist approach has its own weaknesses. It does not take in to account the subjective factors like feelings, expectations, plans and thought processes. Hence, behaviorism can be considered as a mechanistic view of people with a focus on inputs and outputs from the human machine with no regard to the internal processes. (McKenna, 2000). So, behavioristic approach could not be used to study human behavior completely. This paved way for discovery of new framework's to understand behavior.

Cognitive Framework

The cognitive perspective takes in to account the internal mental states and processes of the individual. It attempts to explain the non-observable features of human behavior. (McKenna, 2000). The cognitive approach considers positive and free will aspects of human behavior. According to this framework, cognition precedes behavior and influences the person's thinking, perception, problem solving and information processing. (Luthans, 2005).Analyzing an organization's cognition in an analogous manner to an individual's cognition can be traced back to Simon. (Simon, 1976). An individual manager's cognition is defined as the idiosyncratic knowledge that the manager possesses, while organizational cognition is defined as the shared understanding that the managers have in common with each other. (Meindl et al., 1996).Due to the many changes that are taking place in our society and industry, there has been much interest in the so-called "learning organization"(Klimecki&Lassleben, 1998).Over the last few decades, there has been much interest in understanding managerial and organizational cognition (Meindl et al.,1996).

Social cognitive framework

Social cognitive theory explains psychosocial functioning in terms of triadic reciprocal causation. (Bandura, 1986).In this model of reciprocal determinism, behavior, cognitive and other personal factors and environmental events operate as interacting determinants that influence each other bidirectionally. Three aspects of social cognitive theory can be applied in organizations : the development of people's cognitive, social and behavioral competencies, cultivation of people's beliefs in their capabilities so that they use their talents effectively and enhancement of people's motivation through goal systems.(Bandura,1988., p 276). Social cognitive theory incorporates the importance of behaviorism's contingent environmental consequences, and also includes cognitive processes of self-regulation. The social part refers to the social origin of human thought and cognitive part refers to the contribution of thought processes to human motivation, attitudes and action.(Stajkovic&Luthans, 1998). According to (Akgun et al., 2003) , Social cognitive theory represents the interactive cycle of individuals'behaviors and actions – which are affected by their knowledge structures andthe social/structural elements of the organization and which are shaped bysocial interactions, culture, and reflexivity – depicts the organizationallearning process in a holistic way. (Bandura, 1986) has identified five human capabilities which are exhibited in the social cognition model.
They are:
1) Symbolizing: Processing visual experiences in to cognitive models.
2) Forethought: Employees of an organization plan their actions beforehand.
3) Observational: Employees learn from the behavior of their peers and supervisors.
4) Self-regulatory: Employees set their own internal standards for their desired performance levels.
5) Self-reflective: Employees reflect on their actions and determine the causes for success and failure.
Given its holistic nature of describing the influence of cognition and behavior in an organization, the Social cognitive theory is the most appropriate framework for understanding organizational behavior.

Nature of Organizational behavior

According to (McKenna, 2000), Organizational behavior encounters difficulties when identifying, defining, measuring and predicting relationships between concepts because it deals with subtle human phenomena that is more complex than phenomena which constitutes the physical world. As a consequence, contribution of psychology in understanding organizational behavior is very significant. According to (Stajkovic&Luthans, 1998), Social cognitive theory and self-efficacyprovide an eclectic extension of the traditionalmotivational and behavioral approaches.They have both explanatoryand predictive powers and to be quite differentfrom related psychological constructssuch as self-esteem, expectancy, and locus ofcontrol. Most importantly, not only can SCTprovide a more comprehensive understandingof organizational behavior than eithermotivation or reinforcement theories, but self efficacy, with its clearly demonstrated strong relationship with work-related performance,seems to have considerable implications forimproving employee performance. Based on these findings, a psychological framework for employee treatment has been developed.

Psychological framework for employee wellbeing in organizations

Given the contribution of psychology to understand organizational behavior and effectiveness, capturing the employee morale and ensuring a state of their mental wellbeing are necessary conditions to realize organizational goals. I have identified four E's that effect employee wellbeing and made them the pillars of my psychological model. They are Empathy, Emotional Resilience, Employee Engagement and Employee Empowerment. These are the important psychological aspects which have a direct bearing with employee morale and wellbeing. These aspects have been illustrated by the figure below.
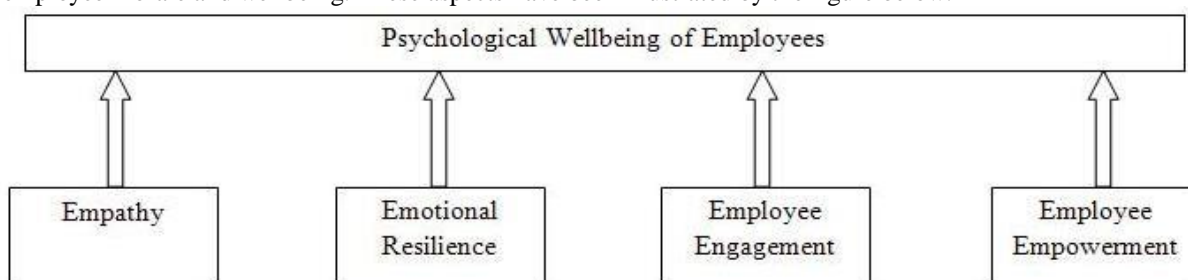
In the following section, each of these aspects and their relation with psychology is discussed.

Empathy

Empathy is ability with many different definitions. They cover a broad spectrum, ranging from caring for other people and having a desire to help them, to experiencing emotions that match another person's emotions, to knowing what the other person is thinking or feeling, to blurring the line between self and other (Hodges &Clean, 2001). Empathy involves listening to and hearing all the messages someone is sending and trying to understand another's perspective on an experience (Reeve, 2009, 436).

Empathy is one of the keys to retaining top employees (Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, 2008).According to (Adele, 2009), there are three competencies which help in developing empathetic attitude which are:

(1) Respectful listening
(2) Feeling the impact on others
 (3)Service Orientation

Empathy requires us to respectfully listen to others. Respectfully listening entails listening with the purpose of understanding. Too often, we listen for the purpose of refuting or building our own case. Respectful listening is especially important when we disagree with someone or when we are in a conflict situation. Empathy also means the ability to feel the impact of situations and understand how our words and actions affect others. Empathy leads to a desire to help others. This desire to be of service, or service orientation, fosters helpful behaviors toward customers, coworkers, and others. With empathy present in our relationships, we orient ourselves toward helping one another (Adele, 2009).

Treating employees with empathy
Managers in an organization need to be empathetic towards their employees. They need to listen to and understand the needs and concerns of their employees. Having an empathetic approach would facilitate problem solving and arriving at the most optimal solutions for any problems facing the employees. Placing himself / herself in the shoes of the employees would enable a manager to feel the pulse of the existing employee morale in the organization. In order to treat employees empathetically, managers need to develop interpersonal skills and adopt methods such as 'role playing' to understand their employees better.

Types of empathy
There are two types of empathy: Cognitive and Emotional

Cognitive empathy
Cognitive empathy considers the perspectives of the other person and allows expressing empathy without getting influenced by the emotions, feelings and actions involved in the situation. Exhibiting this type of empathy requires a non-judgmental and patient approach towards others. (Ken Fracaro, 2001).

Emotional empathy
Emotional empathy will let the person expressing it to emotionally involve with the feelings of the other person. This type of empathy lacks objectivity and may worsen the existing issues instead of solving them. (Ken Fracaro, 2001)Managers need to develop cognitive empathy towards their employees. That would help in effectively handling conflicts at workplace and in teambuilding exercises.

Emotional Resilience
Wilson and Ferch (2005) emphasizequalities of mental flexibility andcreativity in defining 'resilience': "Resilience refers to thepsychological ability to let go ofold internal structures of thinkingand behaving that over the yearshave given us a sense of stabilityand coherence; as well, resiliencerefers to our ability to createand reintegrate new structuresof thinking and behaving thatprovide us a more mature sense ofcoherence". Bartley et al. (2006) defined resilience as "a set of conditions that allow individual adaptation to differentforms of adversity at differentpoints in the life course.Emotional resilience has been used as a concept to imply the flexible use of emotional resources foradapting to adversity (Waugh, Fredrickson, & Taylor, 2008).

Nurturing the emotional resilience of employees
Employees in any organization are affected by various stress factors. It may due to a lack of work-life balance, conflicts within the organization, external conditions like recession, lack of job satisfaction etc. Resilience describes adaptability to different forms of adversities which people encounter in personal as well as professional lives. There are three significant aspects which are related to resilience. They are: Work-related stress, mental health and presenteeism Health and safety Executive of government of United Kingdom has described work-related stress as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types ofdemand placed on them at work". Apart from possessing a sound physical health, having a good mental health is equally important for increasing productivity of employees. World Health Organization has defined mental health as "A state of wellbeing in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normalstresses of life, can work productivelyand fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community". Sainsbury Centre for Mental HealthMental Health at Work has defined presenteeism as "the loss in productivity that occurs when employees come to work but function at less than full capacity because of ill health".(Coats&Lehki, 2008) have described characteristic features of a healthy psychological work environment. They are:

• Management style and culturepromoting mutual trust andrespect;
• Employment security;
• Work that is not characterizedby monotony and repetition;
• Autonomy, control and taskdiscretion;
A balance between the effortsworkers make and the rewardsthat they receive;
• Whether the workers have theskills they need to cope withperiods of intense pressure;
• Observance of the basic principles of procedural justice;
• Strong workplace relationships(social capital).

Nurturing the emotional resilience of employees would result in greater employee productivity and would provide them with greater job satisfaction. An effective leadership style would also have a positive effect the resilience of employees. Employers can promote emotional resilience at work by: creating safe and pleasant physical work environment, promoting healthy employee behaviors, providing interventions to manage mental health issues and promoting communication and social cohesion among employees (Coats &Lehki, 2008).

Employee Engagement

According to Scarlett Surveys, "Employee Engagement is a measurable degree of an employee's positive or negative emotional attachment to their job, colleagues and organization that profoundly influences their willingness to learn and perform at work". Engagement is significantly different from employee satisfaction, motivation and organizational culture. (Schaufeli&Salanova, 2007) mention that engagement is "essential" for contemporary organizations given the many challenges they face (p. 156) and Macey et al. (2009) claim that organizations can gain a competitive advantage through employee engagement and they gave demonstrated that among a sample of 65 firms indifferent industries, the top 25% on an engagement index had a greater return on assets (ROA), profitability, and more than double the shareholder value compared to the bottom 25%.

Enhancing Employee engagement

Kahn (1990) suggested that three psychological conditions serve asantecedents of personal engagement: Psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability.Psychological meaningfulness :Psychological meaningfulness refers to one's belief regarding how meaningful it is to bring oneself to a role performance. It is associated with incentives to engage and the perception that one is receiving a return on investment of one's "self-in-role."Psychological meaningfulness is achieved when people feel worthwhile, valuable, and that they matter. The three factors thatinfluenced meaningfulness were task characteristics, role characteristics and work interactions. (Kahn, 1990)

Psychological safety constitutes one's perception of how safe it is to bring oneself to a role peformance without fear of damage toself-image, status or career. It is associated with reliable, predictable social environments that have clear boundaries of acceptableconduct in which people feel safe to risk self-expression. Kahn (1990) found that the four factors that impacted psychologicalsafety were interpersonal relationships, group and intergroup dynamics, management style, and norms.Psychological availability pertains to one's perception of how available one is to bring oneself into a role. It is associated with the physical, emotional and psychological resources people can bring to their role performances. Kahn (1990) suggested that fourdistractions affected psychological availability: depletion of physical energy, depletion of emotional energy, insecurity, and outsidelives.Employee engagement is expected to have a direct effect on improved job performance (Gruman& Saks, 2011).

According to Leiter and Bakker (2010), Work engagement has far-reaching implications for employees' performance. The energy and focus inherent in workengagement allow employees to bring their full potential to the job. This energetic focus enhances the quality of their corework responsibilities. They have the capacity and the motivation to concentrate exclusively on the tasks at hand (p. 3–4).

Employee Empowerment

The concept of empowerment attracted attention of many researchers and academics in1990s.The empowerment of staff as a theoretical concept has much influence on organizational andmanagement effectiveness and organizational innovation (Akbar et al). Conger and Kanungo (1988) explained empowerment as psychological enabling. They defined empowerment as "a process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organizational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information" (p . 474). (Akbar et al., 2010) explained five aspects of psychological empowerment: Competence, Self-determination, Impact, Meaningful sense and Trust.

Empowered employees are the main assets of any organization. Only when employees are empowered, they can effectively represent their organization and work earnestly towards realizing the shared organizational goals. Employers can empower their employees by creating a sense of purpose for their jobs, demonstrating value for their contribution, sharing clear leadership visions and common goals, providing constant feedback for performance and developing empathy towards them.

Conclusion

Social cognitive theory provides explicit guidelines on how to equip people with the competencies, self-regulatory capabilities, and a resilient sense of efficacy that enables them to enhance their psychological wellbeing and personal accomplishments (Bandura, 1988) .(p 299). These aspects make this the best framework for understanding organizational behavior. The elements of the psychological framework (empathy, empowerment, emotional resilience and engagement) developed for ensuring employee wellbeing can be traced back to the underlying concepts which constitute the social cognitive framework.

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